

Sabine Flach

“What it means to make an image...”

Remarks on the Works by Andreas M. Kaufmann

The close of the 20th century is characterized by the awareness of a deep cultural crisis caused by the loss of a definite Weltanschauung. The heterogeneity that has become a sign of the times is a result of the global crisis in the economy, politics and the social sector, as well as the instability in which groups find themselves due to the disintegration of social systems, progressing narrations and first-hand experiences. This development triggers an accelerated “deplacement” making “transit” a typical experience for today.

The deconstruction of the traditional, linear Weltbild is one of the characteristics of a society oriented toward media and increasing technicalization. Increasing ephemerization and a culture defined by absence lead to a fragmentation of the Weltbild. A cultural-social sphere which is ever more characterized by electronic and digital media is inevitably followed by a change in inherited patterns of perception; existing ideas and “ways of worldmaking” (Nelson Goodman) dissolve.¹ With the increasing technicalization of our Lebenswelt, however paradoxically, an almost unconquerable archiving of mass information can be anticipated while a process of equalizing the importance of information sets in and grows stronger. Information can no longer be considered selectively, thus destabilizing the parameters of social interaction. The western information society in particular is in a constant process of selection and segmentation, so that “the technicalization of memory storage (...) has forced automatisms of storing. New spheres of influence emerge; whoever can navigate the 'selection fields and thresholds' of memory has a power advantage at his or her disposal. Masses of information along with digital concretization will become political territories.”²

The difficulty with naming the correlations between local and global, between unity and diversity is shown in artistic production by the consideration of complex subjects that put art “in an ‘expanded field’ of culture, in an area that until recently belonged exclusively to anthropology.”³

Cultural practice in particular accentuates the growing rift between human consciousness and the reality of the world as an increasingly inflationary ‘techno-transformation’ (Peter Weibel). In this, art turns out to be the territory in which the parameters that constitute consciousness -

¹ cf. Flach, Sabine: documenta X als “manifestation culturelle” In: Kunst + Unterricht, No. 213, 1997. p. 12ff.

²Reck, Hans Ulrich “Transitorische Turbulenzen In: Konstruktionen des Erinnerns. In: Kunstforum International Vol. 127, 1994. p. 83.

³David, Catherine: Undurchsichtige Räume oder die Prozesse kultureller Konstruktion. In: Neue Bildende Kunst 4/5, 1995. p. 18-21.

time, place and the movement necessary for this experience, as well as perception strategies and memory performance as essential prerequisites of being human and positioning oneself - gain a new relevance.

Beginning with his early artistic works, the media artist Andreas M. Kaufmann has also studied the aesthetics of experience in a “society of spectacle” (Guy Debord) and the nonetheless unavoidable constants in the perception of the world. In slide projections, kinetic light collages as well as video and film installations shown in established institutions for viewing art as well as public space, Kaufmann subjects the identity of the subject to a stringent analysis. Human patterns of perception and our position in the social sphere repeatedly appear as main themes. The fundamental look that Kaufmann takes at the culture of European civilization, through his work, finds expression in a conception that brings out the functions and counterbalances of fundamental anthropological principles.

If each work realized by Kaufmann has cognition in situ, and achieves an independent meaning in the series of works, then parameters can also be determined that generally characterize the context of the oeuvre concerning cultural questions.

Strategies of Artistic Mnemosyne

In a visually dominated culture like the European culture, sight is the central medium of memory. The ability to remember is just as much an anthropological constant as its concrete realization in society: archives, rites or texts.⁴ At the same time the symbols and metaphors of cultural practice merge into each other by means of historically variable and culturally determined practices. The goals and objects of memory are changeable and stigmatic for periods of time that can be differentiated according to their cultural-social aspects. In that, according to Walter Benjamin, “During long periods of history the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances.”⁵ Consequently, the various forms of archiving sense perception mark a different manner of dealing with the memory process.

Andreas M. Kaufmann examines the functions and changes in the valency of memory in complex slide installations that question the different types of memory capacities and memory forms of human knowledge. He projects 1,620 constantly rotating reproductions from a five volume encyclopaedia onto the Wewerka Pavilion in Münster in his work ‘Machina Encyclopaedica’ (1995) or reflects the density of information in his work ‘Compulsion and Repetition’ (1994) by layering innumerable newspapers through projecting continually changing

⁴cf. Reck, Hans Ulrich: see above, p. 87ff.

⁵Benjamin, Walter: Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Ff/M. 1963. S. 17.

images from them on the installations walls, or questions changes in the technicalization of the working world in 'Placeless' (1996), and repeats this line of thought with 'The Great Art History Machinery' (1992/93) while exhibited for the second time in Barcelona.

The installation has seven identical sets of forty slides projected into the space by seven slide projectors. Five projectors are in constant motion so that the entire space is filled with anamorphic distortions of different images that are shaped according to the speed of their rotation. All of the projectors' magazines start with one of Giotto's works, but because the magazines are advanced by differently set timers an increasing asynchronicity ensues in the course of the automatic slide advancement. Kaufmann, however, not only produces an arsenal of images that seems to us to be an identity-giving factor of a cultural affiliation to the "collective memory" (Aby Warburg). Through the constant changing and overlapping of the collages of images in this work he also draws a picture of an increasingly inflationary cultural base, since each recipient can ascertain an individual compendium of images for him or herself. Therefore, a continual overlapping of individual and social canons takes place. At the same time, through the continually rotating depictions of European art history, Kaufmann makes it possible for the viewer to differentiate between recognition and memory as he repeatedly visualizes works while, in other moments, he reminds the viewer with images via association. Different overlappings of images in the space not only relate metaphorically to the idea of memory performance and the constant recombination of memory segments. Kaufmann also succeeds at a brilliant depiction of this epoch's consciousness. If one adheres to Michel Foucault's definition that the current epoch is that of space, then the depiction of simultaneous storage processes as cultural memory is in accordance with the superimpositions in Andreas M. Kaufman's work. In that a culturally infinite open space is constituted, "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side by side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. Storage replaces expansion."⁶ By citing imaginary libraries, museums and historical events, Kaufmann names - in the sense of Foucault - a 'heterotopia', a non-place, giving time an important meaning in his works.

But what is time?⁷

As a heterotopia implies endless, accumulating time, it develops a paradox because within a heterotopia time is not linear, but cancels itself out while finding itself. If the differentiation of traditional organizations of space and time within a self-stimulating environment is part of current basic experiences, then this development automatically leads to an intense perception of the quality of this space. In this sense, Kaufmann develops 'videopaintings' such as the 'Videopainting No. 3' (1996), where the content is the irritation of the usual perceptions of time and space. On a video loop,

⁶Foucault, Michel, In: *Diacritics*. Vol. 16. No. 1, p. 23.

⁷Augustinus: *Confessiones*. In: Bernhart, Joseph, Munich, 1955.

Kaufmann shows a hand that slowly opens and closes into a fist. This meaningful gesture⁸ was captured on video and its portrayal was edited with the help of a computer so that it is impossible for the recipient to actively follow the process of the hand opening. The video is not only projected from the video projector onto the opposite wall, but onto part of the floor at the same time so that the viewer only sees an undistorted hand when standing directly next to the projector's lens. If the recipient attempts to establish him or herself by moving about in the space, the result is an anamorphosis of the projection that makes the perception of the change in the gesture even more difficult.

In that the artist's videopaintings circumvent the human perception of time, he makes the perception of the moving gesture impossible and irritates the recipient's usual patterns of perception. As an autopoietic system, a human being can only live through the present, and so it makes sense to organize time by linking categories for time such as past, present and future to perceptibility. "The 'present' is given a special role in order to be able to be linked to the perceptibility of sensory impulses; where there is no perception we operate with 'past' and 'future'. According to this, present is coupled with the concept of 'consciousness'."⁹

As it is impossible to exactly define a change in the course of the gesture in the videopaintings, Kaufmann constructs here an "ungeheure Verdichtung der Gegenwartsfläche" (Götz Großklaus).¹⁰ The recipient experiences this concentration of time and space as a confusing expansion of the present. By describing space in terms of time, Kaufmann abolishes the categorization of the past, present and future of our Lebenswelt and combines them into an unchangeable state of permanence. The recipient experiences that the dwindling sense of time generates a feeling of progressing presence. As temporality is staged without an objective measure in the videopaintings, it has the status of a long, drawn-out present that is experienced as permanence: Permanence understood as 'durée', according to Henri Bergson, is then also set in contrast to time - 'temps'.

Perspective and Cognition

A state of continual presence is explicated in Kaufmann's work by the position of the viewer. This position takes on an important meaning in the work and is automatically linked to his or her stance in relation to the work, and, in turn, his or her perspective perception. The perspective that steers a person's view in a certain way is, on the other hand, further limited by a given frame. This is a perception code familiar to us through our everyday experience and accepted as

⁸ Foucault, Michel. Andere Räume: In: Barck, Karl-Heinz, u.a. (Hg): Aisthesis. Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik. Leipzig 1991, S. 34ff.

The hand turned forward and opened is a hand of Christ's passion and not only evokes the memory of Christ as a man of pain, but also the depiction of innocence in the cultural context.

⁹ Schmidt, Siegfried J.: Gedächtnis-Erzähler-Identität. In: Assmann, Aleida, a.o. (Ed.): Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung, Frankfurt/Main, 1991. p. 378ff.

¹⁰Translator's note: Großklaus speaks of "an immense concentration on the layer of the present" meaning there is a great amount of information concentrated on the same plane of time and space, the present.

a part of a natural requirement of all sight.¹¹ However, Kaufmann shows how much the choice of perspective determines what is perceived by confronting the viewer again and again with the fact that the artistic work can only be perceived in fragments or as an anamorphosis as in the light projection, 'The Creation of the World' (1993).

In Urawa City in Japan Kaufmann projected a tracing of Michelangelo's ceiling fresco 'The Creation of the Sun, Moon and the Planets' onto the architecture of the Gyokozoun Temple and parts of the park in front of it. The figure of God the father from Michelangelo's fresco could only be recognized as such from the perspective of the projector. According to the direction the recipient moves in while viewing the work, the image disintegrates into fragmental or anamorphic 'ruins of perception' (Andreas M. Kaufmann). In his works, Kaufmann not only discusses the role of monoperspective perception, but shows how it is exactly the distortion that creates the essential meaning of the work, since in the meeting of two cultures - here as a projection of a western fresco onto the Asiatic pavilion - obviously raises the question of the viewer's standpoint in the cultural convergence.

In that Andreas M. Kaufmann often uses reproductions in his artistic works he critically discusses the working through of the repetitions that show themselves in memory and perception. In that he critically questions cultural development and ironically breaks constituents of meaning, he identifies the crumbling of how our outer reality has been defined until now. Kaufmann's work do not mean a loss of reality, but are the foundations for new ways of seeing.

(Translated from German by Rosanne Altstatt)

NOTES

¹ cf. Flach, Sabine: documenta X als "manifestation culturelle" In: Kunst + Unterricht, No. 213, 1997. p. 12ff.

² Reck, Hans Ulrich: "Transitorische Turbulenzen In: Konstruktionen des Erinnerns. In: Kunstforum International Vol. 127, 1994. p. 83.

³ David, Catherine: Undurchsichtige Räume oder die Prozesse kultureller Konstruktion. In: Neue Bildende Kunst 4/5, 1995. p. 18-21.

⁴ cf. Reck, Hans Ulrich see above, p. 87ff.

¹¹ cf. Jutz, Gabriele/Schlemmer, Gottfried: Zur Geschichtlichkeit des Blicks. In: Blümlinger, Christa (Eds.): Sprung im Spiegel. Filmisches Wahrnehmen zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit. Wien, 1990. p. 15ff.

⁵ Benjamin, Walter: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, translated in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Frascina & Harrison (Eds.). Harper & Row, New York, 1982. p. 219.

⁶ Foucault, Michel, In: *Diacritics*. Vol. 16. No. 1, p. 23.

⁷ Augustinus: *Confessiones*. In: Bernhart, Joseph, Munich, 1955.

⁸ The hand turned forward and opened is a hand of Christ's passion and not only evokes the memory of Christ as a man of pain, but also the depiction of innocence in the cultural context.

⁹ Schmidt, Siegfried J.: *Gedächtnis-Erzähler-Identität*. In: Assmann, Aleida, et. al. (Ed.): *Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, Frankfurt/Main, 1991. p. 378ff.

¹⁰ Translator's note: Großklaus speaks of "an immense concentration on the layer of the present" meaning there is a great amount of information concentrated on the same plane of time and space, the present.

¹¹ cf., Jutz, Gabriele/Schlemmer, Gottfried: *Zur Geschichtlichkeit des Blicks*. In: Blümlinger, Christa (Eds.): *Sprung im Spiegel. Filmisches Wahrnehmen zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit*. Wien, 1990. p. 15ff.